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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUDAPEST 000168

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE LAMORE, EUR/PGI JODY
BUCKNEBERG, AND DRL

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KDEM HU

SUBJECT: NEW VIOLENCE AGAINST ROMA TURNS FOCUS TO POLICE
RESPONSE

REF: A. BUDAPEST 0149

1B. 2008 BUDAPEST 01137

Classified By: A/POL/ECON:JMARTINSON, REASON 1.4(A)

11. (U) The string of violence against Roma continued on February 23 when two people were murdered in their home in the village of Tatarszentgyorgy in central Hungary. The victims, a 27-year-old father and his 5-year-old son, were inside when attackers threw a Molotov cocktail into the home and shot the victims from behind as they tried to escape. The victim's other two children also sustained serious injuries in the attack.

12. (U) Political leaders and Roma representatives quickly responded to the attack by issuing statements to the media. President Solyom said he was "shocked" and "appalled" at the attacks, while the leader of the liberal Free Democrats Party, Gabor Fodor, said the attacks demonstrate that "something is very wrong with Hungary." The rhetoric from Roma leaders was more alarming, with MP Florian Farkas predicting a "civil war" in Hungary "unless a solution is found for the integration of the Roma." National Gypsy Authority leader Orban Kolompar blamed the media and certain politicians for the crimes and called on Hungarian Roma to "join forces" to confront the current crisis. Hungary's minority ombudsman, Erno Kallai, said Hungary's mainstream and the Roma are in the midst of a "cold war" where "everyone hates the other."

13. (U) Along with the chorus of public officials decrying the attacks against the Roma, the government has offered some proposals to address the problem. Prime Minister Gyurcsany recently revived an effort to outlaw hate speech and said he will initiate a process to amend the constitution to achieve this objective. The main opposition party FIDESZ, however, opposes this idea and has stated that stricter penalties for criminals is the solution to deterring racially motivated crimes. However, a FIDESZ-backed "three strikes and you're out" bill which would have mandated more severe punishment for repeat offenders was rejected on March 2 by Parliament.

14. (U) The Prime Minister has also put forward a proposal to increase the number of police officers in 200 towns and villages across the country and has promised more funding to support law enforcement efforts. (Comment: Though the proposed increase in police numbers may provide long-term improvement in public safety, given the very austere budgetary environment in which Hungary finds itself, prospects to realize this proposal seems dim, leaving the Roma community vulnerable for further targeting. End Comment.)

15. (U) The police in particular are drawing growing public scrutiny for their handling of the investigations into the attacks and their inability to curb the violence. The most recent incident was the fifty-fourth violent attack against

Roma in Hungary in the past one and a half years. Seventeen of these incidents involved Molotov cocktails, and seven people have been killed in the attacks. Despite the growing violence against Roma, there has not yet been a single arrest in any of the fifty-four reported attacks. Other than a report that a former police officer is being questioned as a suspect in the murder of two Roma in November, there is no additional information that suggests that police are closing-in on the perpetrators. Although the public seems to believe this is a sign of police incompetence, others worry that it may be a sign of police indifference towards Roma crime victims.

¶6. (C) Roma leader and Member of the European Parliament, Viktoria Mohacsi, fears that police culpability could extend beyond either incompetence or indifference. During a conversation with PolOff on February 24, Mohacsi expressed deep concern that the police may have been in collusion with the attackers in some of the cases. Mohacsi was on the scene of the attack in Tatarszentgyorgy the morning of the murders and said she believes there are clear signs of an attempt by police to corrupt the investigation. She noted that despite the extensive evidence that the victims were murdered, the police ruled out foul play within minutes of arriving at the scene. She said they hastily reported that the victims instead died of smoke inhalation resulting from an electrical fire. Mohacsi reported that police also refused to interview witnesses until she arrived on the scene nearly ten hours after the attack. She told PolOff that as she was speaking with the policeman in charge of the scene, a Roma woman approached them with a bloody, bullet-ridden shirt in her hands and screamed, "Would you please take this bloody shirt

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as proof?" The officer reportedly responded by accusing the woman, saying, "Why were you hiding this evidence from the police?"

¶7. (C) Mohacsi also noted that the police did not seal the crime scene until after she arrived and began inquiring into the attack. Until that time, witnesses and onlookers were allowed to enter the home at will and reportedly removed items including bullet casings and a broken bottle believed to have been the Molotov cocktail.

¶8. (U) For their part, the police contend that their initial handling of the case in Tatarszentgyorgy was nothing more than simple carelessness. During a police press conference attended by EmbOffs on February 27, police officials acknowledged that local officers were at fault for failing to seal the crime scene until several hours after the attack. But they blamed this carelessness, in part, on the village doctor who allegedly determined that the victims died of smoke inhalation, leading the police to quickly rule-out foul play. Contrary to Viktoria Mohacsi's claim, police officials stated that no one in the village attempted to provide any evidence to the police that could have led them to suspect a crime. They said that the police were only alerted to the possibility of a crime eight hours later when they allegedly received a phone call from someone who found four bullet casings inside the home.

¶9. (C) In a private conversation with the Embassy's Legal Attache (LEGATT) on March 2, police officials expressed concern over the relative inexperience of the local police officers working the investigations. According to the officials, most of these officers are under the age of 30 and lack any significant crime investigation experience.

¶10. (C) Viktoria Mohacsi condemned the police's response to the fifty-four violent crimes against Roma since 2007, saying that the police "always exclude race as a motive" and that there is a widely-held belief within the police department that "all gypsies are criminals." She said that in several cases the police have contradicted themselves by saying that the perpetrators are "Nazis" but then publicly denied that

the attacks were motivated by race. Mohacsi's mounting distrust of the police was evident during her meeting with PolOff when she said she feared for her life because she was uncertain if even the police could protect her. Mohacsi is currently under twenty-four hour police protection.

¶111. (C) Although no one has been arrested in any of the fifty-four crimes, police officials reported that there are some common links in the murder cases that could suggest that either a serial killer(s) or some type of organized effort is behind the Roma killings. They reported that all of the victims lived in the last house on the road with easiest access out of a small village, all of the attacks occurred during the night, and all of the victims died from gunshot wounds. Viktoria Mohacsi also shared with PolOff that each of the attacks took place in villages along a major highway with easy escape routes. She said that police had also shared confidential information with her that they believe that the same murder weapon was used in at least two of the attacks. Additional confidential information shared by the National Bureau of Investigation with LEGATT on March 2 alleges that the perpetrators may have used Google Earth software to target homes in rural villages prior to attacking them.

¶112. (C) Comment: Embassy Budapest LEGATT offered forensics assistance to the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) which has the lead on the investigations. NBI accepted the offer and is negotiating with LEGATT to determine the exact assistance LEGATT will provide. Post believes this relationship may give us a valuable opportunity to assess the police investigations into these crimes. End comment.

Foley